

## Pastoral Parsem

The cute little village is endowed with ineffable natural beauty

### By Alister Miranda (Goa Today)

Pause upon entering Parsem and a strange faint melody you are most likely to hear. With the wooded hills and the verdant fields swaying rhythmically, a kind of soothing and scenic melodrama unfolds. The mystical hum could be attributed to the singing spirits of the innumerable Indian classical singers and musicians that this village gave birth to. Nature's song that begins in the hill tops, cascades down into the valley, soars up the set of hillocks and then floats away on the water of the river Chapora into the Arabian sea.

Lying four kilometres from the Chopdem ferry point, Parsem is one of Pernem taluka's rustic showpieces. It's bucolic heart beats in its valley, where toiling agriculturists produce blooms of rich harvests throughout the year. Its topographical profile encompasses a hilly range on the North, fertile fields watered by a rivulet and held together by another set of hillocks towards the South, over whose shoulder once was another stretch of fields by the river Chapora.

Parsem has four prominent Porob Parsekar Desai families, who were and still are the village landlords. The families of Late Nana Desai, late Ladkoba Desai, late Hari Jivaji Desai and Parisram Desai are all related to each other. Formerly, all Desais were Sardars of Adil Shah and to them this village were given as a Revenue generator; for which, in return, an army would be provided by the Desais. More than 400 years back the Revenue, which was popularly referred to as *Chappan Hazarachi Sardarki*, was 56,000. History narrates that Desais had even fought against Shivaji at Sawantwadi, but, were defeated in the battle. In that age there was only one Porob Parsekar Desai family.

The village is predominantly Hindu with just 10 per cent Catholics and only two Muslim families. The main temple here, with a majestic façade, is dedicated to Devi Bhagwati. Next to the imposing structure lie two small temples of Ravalnath and Santeri, while the water-surrounded Mahadev and the Bramavishnu Maheshvari temples dot the country side. Dussera, Ganesh Chaturthi, Holi and Zatra are celebrated with traditional Goan pomp and festivity. The Zatra, which attracts *Parsekars* from all over, is annually held during the end of November or the first half of December.

The overpowering Hindu presence notwithstanding, pleasantly astounding is the existent communal harmony. It is to be witnessed to be believed. All credit goes to the Hindus, for the brotherhood they exude is amazing. It is like one big community living together. "The annual Zatra of Bhagwati is celebrated with as much pomp as Chris-tmas", informs Anand Desai. The unadulterated communal harmony that has been handed down from generation to generation has become a way of life for the *Parsekars*.

A manifestation of this unity and concern was witnessed when the Catholic *Parsekars'* request for upgrading the chapel of Senhora do Rosario at Vai Dongor to a Church remained frozen. A delegation of Portuguese-speaking Hindu landlords then accompanied their Catholic brethren to the Bishop's palace in Panjim and requested His Lordship to consider granting Parsem the status of a parish, which then was attached to the Pernem parish. The Bishop, so moved by this gesture and profound show of communal harmony, immediately pronounced Parsem as an independent parish. The Catholic community of Vai Dongor, mostly hailing from Uccassaim, Siolim and Parra singing hosanas for the benovelence of the Hindu *Bhatkars* who gifted them the land they reside on and live off. Formerly 25 families, now only five exist as those who moved to greener pastures chose not to return.

Until a few years ago there was always a resident priest at the Church. Now, Salesians who run a school in neighbouring Tuem look after the spiritual needs of the skeletal Catholic population. The Church feast, which is preceded by novenas, is celebrated on the 16th of May. It was previously held on October 7.

A priest most fondly remembered by Catholics and Hindus alike is the late Fr Adolf Pereira, who hailed from Verna. During his quarter-century stay in the village he took religiosity to great heights, while further cementing the bonds of Parsem's celebrated communal harmony. With no doctors in the village those days, he would dispense free country medicines to one and all. He would tirelessly move about the village and visit each and every Hindu family, whether rich or poor. "I remember Fr Adolf moving around the village and we Hindu villagers used to donate since the Catholics were few and not well to do. Father used to mingle among us as a brother," narrates Desai.

Since agriculture is the main occupation, farmers are a plenty and so also are masons. Practically every Hindu household has one skilled mason.

Another noteworthy aspect of Parsem is that it has always been musically blessed. Tuneful talents abound in the village – it's more like a musical legacy that is continually handed over from generation to generation. Classical vocalists and musicians spring up every season. The village annually organises a *Sangeeth Sammelan* (Indian classical music festival) in the premises of the Bhagwati temple in memory of the famed violinist, the late Sridhar Parsekar. This festival attracts prominent singers and musicians from across the nation. From among the Catholics is Goa's popular tiatrist, known for his hard-hitting satires, Marcelino de Betim.

Always remembered for pioneering the formation of ladies' theatre groups in Goa will be the Stree Sangeet Natak Madal, founded by Bala Parsekar. In 1917, this all-ladies ensemble gave stand-out performances all over Goa, North Karnataka and the Konkan belt of Maharashtra, upto Mumbai.

The *Parsekars* have also been vibrant on the sports, theatre and cultural fronts. There once existed the Parsem Yuvak Sangh (PYS) who excelled at staging Marathi plays and winning various drama competitions. They often represented Goa in Maharashtra and Delhi. Says former Sarpanch and president of the PYS Ganpath Kalangutkar, "Since 1975, for five consecutive years we won several prizes doing experimental Marathi theatre. Our most successful production was 'Axi Pakare Yethi', a Vijay Tendulkar play." The club now in the forefront, is Dhruv Sports and Cultural Club, which runs a gymnasium in the Panchayat Ghar.

Parsem, well connected to Korgao, Tuem and Pernem, and also approachable by the Camurlim ferry, is made up of the wards of Chonsai, Modlovaddo, Bamon vaddo, Kambli Vaddo, Deull Vaddo, Chaude Vaddo and Vai Dongor. The majority of the Catholics reside at Via Dongor, while a few families live at Deull Vaddo. The 5000-strong population is represented by seven elected representatives in a panchayat that is presently headed by Sarpanch Ajay Kalangutkar. Agarvaddo in Chopdem was formerly part of the Parsem Panchyat. All along the panchayats have been hard working and responsibly overseeing the development of the village, while also vigilantly making sure that the essence that makes Parsem what it is, is not lost. A bank, a sub-post office, provision stores, etc fill up Deull vaddo, converting it into a kind of a bustling meeting place, which once lay barren. A mini-market shed also exists, but the *Parsekars* rely on the weekly Thursday bazaar of Pernem for a majority of their provisions. There is no manufacturing unit worth mention, but in 1980, for two years, a Diamond Cutting factory functioned from the Desai residence. "It employed 80 local people and paid them a good salary. It closed down due a workers' strike," informs Devendra Desai.

Once without any educational facilities, Parsem has come a long way and can today boast of Durga English High School, Parse High School, and four government primary school, one of which is named after Dr Bhau Daji Laad, the most renowned son of the village. This school, which was constructed on donated land, sadly remains closed since this academic years due to a boycott by the villagers, who are protesting against the government's decision to clandestinely hand over their revered institution to an affiliate of the RSS. The oldest Marathi *shala* was privately run by Shabi Desai we are told.

The Late Dr Bhau Daji Laad, a physician, freedom fighter and social worker, was a great visionary of modern Mumbai. So great was his contribution that there are tomes written about the great personality. Mumbai's 'Bhaucha Dakka', the fishing dock, is named after him.

Standing up to any injustice is inborn, as the *Parsekars* played an important role in Goa's liberation struggle. Led by the Late Yeshwant Bugde, Dattaram Bugde and Banudas Polji the freedom movement gained popularity. A memorial to the freedom fighter is erected near the Bhagwati temple, in memory of the three freedom fighters who were shot in succession as they hoisted the Indian tri-colour.

Transport facilities now are up to the mark, but in only the remotely tucked ward of Via Dongor is the frequency of buses not so healthy. A stunning change for the older generation, from the time bullock carts rolled on Parsem's dusty roads. "There was no transport whatsoever. When we went to Morjim beach during the summer months for our annual *mudanca*, we mostly footed it out, or rarely went by a bullock cart. Cars were unheard and unseen. A car that would seldom drive down from Pernem would attract hordes of onlookers," reminisces the ageing Kalangutkar.

The Parsem of old was minus transport, health services and wealth. The villagers dwelt in a world of their own, battling

the ills of life in their own rural way. With no doctors, the local *voiginn* was their only saviour, especially while delivering babies. Complications would most surely mean death. "With no hospital anywhere and no means of transporting the sick, we lived and died here," informs an elder. Later though, the only medico, one Dr Bambolkar who practised in Camurlim, would, rain or shine, unhesitatingly cross over by canoe to treat the sick in Parsem.

In the forests, majestically roamed tigers and wild boars. The tigers have disappeared, but the boars still make an occasional appearance. The waterlogged wasteland in river-banked Vai Dongor were fertile fields until the unmaintained bundhs, built by Goa's first chief minister Dayanand Bhandarkar using the expertise of the Kunbis from Salcete, broke down. The fields were more known for the fish they were infested with. "We used to bring home only what we needed and the rest we threw back into the fields. Clams also chose to make the fields their breeding place and they would form almost a metre-high carpet," reminisces 83-year old Diogo Xavier Noronha, the first *Parsekar* to fly to the Gulf. These 'shelly' skeletons are now dug up for commercial gains and a flourishing business is in place.

The fish, clams and tigers might have disappeared, but Parsem still remains refreshingly pristine and laid back. In every sense of the word, pastoral it indeed is. And may it always remain that way.

## **ROLL OF HONOUR**

Late Govind Mangesh Laad – Economist and Editor.

Late Dr Bhau Daji Laad – Physician, Freedom Fighter, Social worker

Late Parshuram Buva Parsekar – Classical vocalist

Late Damu Anna Parsekar – Tabla player

Late Balchandra Parsekar – Tabla player

Late Yeshwant Bugde – Freedom Fighter

### **Dattaram Bugde – Freedom Fighter**

Banudas Polji – Freedom Fighter

Ashok Desai – Asst. Commissioner of Excise, Govt. of Goa

Gopal Desai – Managing Director of Industrial Development Corporation, Goa (Retd)

Sumedha Kamat Desai – Professor of Literature, Award Winning Konkani & Marathi

Writer, Journalist

Marcelino de Betim – Tiatrist

Ramanand Laad – Former chairman of BEST, Mumbai, and BMC corporator

Lat Sridhar Parsekar — Violinist

Balchandra Kalangutkar – Marathi Actor & Director, Idol maker

Surendra Desai – Advocate

Dr Amol Mahaldar – Orthopaedic Surgeon

Dr Aruna Prabhu – Physician

Devendra Arolkar – Mechanical engineer

Vaishali Madhukar Prabhu – Chartered Accountant

Keshav Atmaram Desai – Superintendent of Police (retd)

Dr Balchandra Krishna Kandolkar – Professor, writer & Marathi literature critic

Hanumant Govandi – Advocate & Notary

D S Petkar – Advocate & Notary